

P•R•O•P

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH: OLDER PEOPLE

PROP Project Overview

As western societies experience an aging population, improving, or even maintaining, the quality of health and social care of older people is a significant issue. Reflecting wider trends, in Scotland by 2031 the number of people aged 65 and over is projected to be 58% higher than in 2004. This represents a significant challenge to health and social care services, as well as to individuals providing care to relatives or friends.

In order to improve care for older people, there is a need for an improved evidence base that relates directly to the needs of those providing services and developing policy. The PROP project brings together a group of practitioners, including social workers, nurses and care workers, who

are conducting small-scale pieces of research about care for older people. These projects are informed by the day-to-day concerns of policy and practice and are driven by a desire to improve services for older people.

Practitioners on this project are supported by a team of academics, practitioners and specialists in evidence-use and knowledge media. This team provides one-to-one mentorship and support throughout the research process. Collectively, we aim to draw together existing evidence, generate new evidence and improve the use of this evidence to support the health and wellbeing of older people in Scotland.

This project is funded through the Economic and Social Research Council.

Key Lessons about Practitioner-Research

Practitioner-research programmes offer valuable insights into the use of research evidence. They provide a window into the processes of knowledge exchange between research and practice, increase the use of research evidence in practice-settings, and increase the capacity for research by providing practitioners with research training. In turn, these programmes tend to produce research which is more relevant to practice because the projects have been generated out of local knowledge and experience.

The following recommendations are based on the evaluations of two previous practitioner-research programmes. The first was carried out in 2007-08 by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) and the Centre for the Older Person's Agenda (COPA) at Queen Margaret University. The second was carried out by CRFR and the Social Work Department at the University of Edinburgh in 2009-2010 (CRFR/COPA 2008, Wilkinson et al (forthcoming)).

In order for these programmes to be successful, they need to:

- Create space for dialogue and critical reflection between professional groups and across organisations
- Create a structure which includes time for the research programme to be planned and delivered. This includes time away from work to complete the research, attendance at training events as well as space in the programme to complete the ethics approval process
- Ensure that practitioners have a sense of ownership over their research and champions within their organisation who will help to take that research forward
- Face-to-face contact with mentors and other researchers to ensure there is adequate support for research projects

Billie Morrow – NHS Lothian

This project investigates the concept of 'vulnerability' in care for older people. It uses in-depth interviews to compare the views of older people in community and hospital settings. This research is particularly interested in how older people conceive of themselves and whether or not they view themselves as vulnerable.

Amy Begg – NHS Lothian

This research focuses on the process of 'boarding' patients in hospital wards overnight. Boarding can occur when there is a high intake of patients in a unit and too few beds. It aims to explore the appropriateness of boarding elderly patients and the opinions of older people who have been boarded.

Janice Caine - Alzheimer Scotland

This project focuses on music therapy for people with dementia. It examines the impact of listening to music on the mood of the person with dementia and their carer. Participants and their carers will be provided with an MP3 player and supported with selecting music to play. Group conversations will be used to ascertain the impact of music therapy on the person with dementia and their carer.

Gabrielle Colston – Alzheimer Scotland

This project explores the Early Stage Support Service for people with Dementia in Dundee. This model of post-diagnostic support focuses on peer support and meaningful activities and engagement. This project aims to measure the outcomes for people with dementia and their carers as well as to assess the cost-effectiveness of this form of support.

Kathy Litteljohn – Glasgow City Council

The focus of this research is the new model on Hospital Discharges in Glasgow City called the Assessment at Home Pathway (AAH). It was developed by the Joint Health and Social Work Assessment At Home Working Group and implemented in Glasgow City Council Social Work Service in 2012. This research explores the early stages of implementation, with a particular interest in the experiences of staff using this new model of assessment.

Anne Scott – NHS Lothian

This project investigates nurse's general knowledge of the medical specialty of Elderly Care. It focuses on the use of Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment (which covers medical, function, psychological and environmental issues) to identify issues within the elderly patient group. This project aims to examine nurses' knowledge of this tool and to support their knowledge of Elderly Care through a prompt care or poster.

Catherine Robertson – West Lothian Council

West Lothian Council has recently changed the role of their personal care workers (PCW) to form an established re-ablement team. The focus of this group is to provide a re-ablement model of home care and supply a new crisis care service. This is in line with the Joint Improvement Team (JIT) initiatives and part of the 'Reshaping Care for Older People' agenda. This research investigates whether the training has supported staff in their new role as re-ablement workers.

Abenet Tsegai and Grant Dugdale - VOCAL and Midlothian Council

This research focuses on three different approaches to carer's assessment: the statutory carers' assessment framework which is carried out by Social Workers at Midlothian Council as compared to VOCAL's carer outcomes tool and a self-assessment by the carer. This research aims to explore the outcomes achieved with and for carers through different approaches to assessment.